



Principles for animal-assisted work with domestic animals and pets

Animal assisted work refers to animal-assisted therapy, animal-assisted pedagogy and animal-assisted activities.

Each organization offering and using animal-assisted work in the frame of ESAAT (European Society for Animal-assisted Therapy) the european umbrella association for animal-assisted therapy commits itself to the following binding guidelines:

Preamble

Indispensable and mandatory requirements for animal-assisted work is keeping and handling of animals used in therapy according to the standards of the European Convention for the Protection of Pet-Animals and the animal protection law of the respective countries. The most actual version of this law will be valid.

The owner of the animal is responsible for adequate placement and care of the animal according to the animal protection law as well as for the general well-being of the animal during all animal assisted interventions. Frequency, duration and intensity of an intervention must not affect the well-being of the animal. The owner is obliged to stop the intervention in case the animal shows any signs of distress.

Well-timed sterilization to keep the number of animals effective is part of animal keeping according to animal protection laws.

Each person doing animal-assisted work is only allowed to keep a certain number of animals. The possible number of animals is based on the guarantee that each individual animal will be kept and cared for according to animal protection laws.

I. General Principles

The following principles apply for all species and breeds, used in the context of animal-assisted work:

The animal must have a socially acceptable behaviour towards humans to be qualified for use in animal-assisted work.

When handling pups or other young animals it is very important ,that neither the well-being of the female nor that of the young will be affected.

Sick animals or animals that are hurt, must be examined by a Veterinarian immediately and if possible of course must be treated.

Training of the animal must comply with training guidelines by the “Verein Tiere als Therapie”¹ (association of animals for therapy), if they are already set up.

Due to the extensive experience of TAT (Tiere als Therapie) in the training of human/animal teams ESAAT has adopted their educational and training guidelines.

The qualification of an animal must be evaluated ,tested and documented according to the TAT- test or a test from another training center accredited by ESAAT.

Only examiners who have demonstrated and proofed necessary theoretical knowledge and practical experience are allowed to administer these tests and potential re-checks.

Courses to obtain and certify for these qualifications may be offered by ESAAT; ESAAT may also certify and recognize courses offered by its members.

II. Principles for animal-assisted work using specific animal species

1. Animal-assisted work with small mammals

1.1. General Principles

When the client is allowed to touch the animal, in principle only rabbits, guinea pigs and rats are suitable for use in animal-assisted work. In special cases and if certain requirements are met even coloured mice (Farbmäuse) can be used.

The animals must be habituated to human contact and must be exposed to various environmental stimuli at an early stage of life in order to assure adequate social behaviour.

For appropriate care, these animals must be housed in groups, must have an adequate and structured environment, adequate courses of and room for

movement, as well as appropriate activity and occupation as well as resting possibilities are necessary.

To ensure this adequate housing the animal holder needs to explain the housing conditions in a plausible way when the animals are checked and evaluated; special emphasis is put on the type of enclosure, the space that is available and the setting, equipment and structure necessary for each individual species.⁵

1.2. Requirements for specific species

In addition to the general principles the following requirements for each individual species have to be considered.⁶

1.2.1 Rabbits

For the training of these animals the enclosed training-tips have to be followed.⁶

The rabbit has to be marked permanently and non-reversibly by microchip. When evaluating or re-checking the animal, a health certificate and a certificate of vaccination (Myxomatose, RDH) must be presented.

When transporting or using the animal in therapy, special attention must be taken that the animal is not separated from its group for too long, in the best case work will be done with two rabbits at the same time.

When facing adverse conditions of temperature like heat or strong differences in temperature (free enclosure in winter –work in heated rooms) rabbits should not be used, according to animal protection law. Special emphasis has to be put on stress signals Freeze and if necessary a therapy session has to be stopped. Roughage must be available all the time also when working with the animal.

1.2.2. Guinea pigs

Only those animals habituated to petting and fondling right after birth with a significantly lower flight tendency and a relaxed-curious behaviour when interacting with humans are suited (adapted) for therapy animals.

Use of guinea pigs is only acceptable when permanent contact - at least accoustical-is given with the social group.

Each guinea pig must be clearly identifiable with a picture or an accurate description.

Special emphasis has to be but on stress signals (freeze) and if necessary the use has to be interrupted. Roughage must be available all the time also when working with the animal.

⁵especially resting areas and structures for climbing, equipment for activities, possibility to dig, feeding and water places, quality of feed, possibility for exercise and free moving.

⁶ enclosure for trainingstips

1.2.3. Rats

Neophobic behaviour on unfamiliar territory has to be faced by adequate habituation (approx. 22. – 50. days after birth) and a stimulating environment.

Each rat must be clearly identifiable by picture or an accurate description. Use of rats is only acceptable when permanent contact – at least olfactory – is given with the social group.

Special attention has to be placed on calming signals and signals of displeasure (beating the tail up and down) as well as stress signals during their use at work.

1.2.4. “Farbmäuse” (coloured mice)

At work

2. Animal-assisted work with cats

To ensure an adequate social behavior, the animals must be exposed to sufficient positive contact with humans, conspecific animals and other animals as well as environmental stimuli during the first two months after birth.

When a cat is evaluated and tested the animal handler has to prove adequate housing by either describing or handing in a sketch of the structures and available equipment which is important for a cat.

Special emphasis has to be put on feeding and water places, litter boxes, scratching posts, places where they can retreat and adequate possibilities for activity and exploration (for example: balcony or outdoors)

Each cat must be marked unmistakably and permanently with a micro chip.

3. Animal-assisted work with dogs

To ensure adequate social behaviour the animals must have enough positive contact with humans, fellow dogs, other animals and environmental stimuli during the socialization period (which means up to the 12th post-natal week).

Keeping therapy dogs in cages (kennels) or keeping them on a chain is illegal.

The use of equipment adverse to animal protection law (for example electric training aids, like e-collars etc., chemical training devices, choke chains and prong collars, ultrasonic devices) is forbidden during the training as well as during animal-assisted work.

Adequate keeping of the dog has to be evidenced when testing the dog by presenting a description of the housing conditions; with special emphasis on the form and frequency of contact to humans and other dogs as well as the possibilities for activity and exercise.

Must be permanently and unmistakably marked by a micro-chip.

The human/dog team has to undergo annual re-checks and an annual veterinary examination is mandatory.

Dogs having discontinued training for protection dogs are excluded from training and verification as therapy dogs. In exceptional cases dogs with completed training for protection dogs may be accepted for the verification of therapy dogs on application, if they seem especially qualified to work as therapy dogs. In this case the dog will be checked by a commission.

When testing and verifying hunting dogs as therapy dogs, special emphasis is placed on behaviour patterns resulting from hunting instincts.

4. Animal-assisted work with horses

Horses used for animal-assisted therapy or pedagogy are in no case allowed to be kept in tie-stalls.

It is recommended to keep a group of young horses of the same age (horses up to an age of 30 months) be kept together in groups and in stable systems (pens) allowing permanent free movement, in which each horse with a withers height of 165 cm should have at least 10m² absolute floor space.

To ensure adequate social behaviour, contact with young horses up to an age of 4 years should be enhanced.

Regarding size, height, surface conditions and equipment, horse stables have to comply with the minimum requirements according to guideline 98/58/EG dated 20th of July 1998. The stables must be high enough so that the tallest horse is able to rear up on his hind legs with the head up.

Each animal must have an area with a layer of absorbent bedding. This bedding area must be designed and arranged in a way, that all animals can use it unhindered at the same time.

If the animals do not have constant outdoor access, the stables must have sufficient exposure to daylight, if necessary they must be lighted with electric light, but the natural day-night rhythm must be followed.

Even in the stables the horses must be protected against insects. (for ex. installing stable curtains or using repellents harmless to horses)

Horses must have the opportunity of free exercise in all gaits, at least 3 times a week and must be able to show their natural social behaviour. Training, use in sports, as well as using leading facilities or therapeutic use of the horse, is not considered, free exercise. The paddock area must be partly paved, the whole area however must be drained.

If horses are kept outside during the whole year, a windprotective shelter, large enough so that all horses may use it at the same time, must be provided.

Horses must be provided with a sufficient amount of forage or concentrates, to satisfy their needs in terms of nutritional physiology and feeding behaviour. The required amount of feed must be available at least 3 times a day for the length of at least one hour each time. If the horses come from private personal bred they must be marked electronically (chipped).

Regular professional hoof care is necessary for all animals and must be documented in written form

Therapy horses have to be checked by a veterinarian at least once a year.

Generally it is essential, that the mobility of the horse's head not be limited needlessly during training and therapeutic use.

Training aids contrary to animal protection (such as spurs, martingale) are neither allowed during training nor during therapeutic work. If possible snaffles should not be used during therapeutic work, but questions regarding insurance law should be clarified in advance.

Therapeutic use of the horse should not happen prior to an age of 4 years. All horses need at least one day of rest per week, furthermore each animal has must be granted periods of rest or days off, appropriate to its age, its constitution and its state of health.

For enclosures please contact ESAAT- mostly those are only available for ESAAT members